4: Berndt & Berndt E-5 (1946-1947) 1948
O117 Murngin O117

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[TITLE PAGE]

4: Berndt & Berndt E-5 (1946-1947) 1948
O117 Murngin O117

SACRED FIGURES OF ANCESTRAL BEINGS OF ARNHEM LAND.

By R. M. Berndt and C. H. Berndt

THIS paper consists of brief notes recording ten carved human figures from Yirrkalla in north-eastern Arnhem Land, Northern Territory of Australia, obtained during recent anthropological field-work (1946-47) in that region. They are part of a unique series of 51 human figures carved by aboriginal men,[1] all of indigenous inspiration and execution. Like sacred and secular ritual objects of a conventionalized type in other parts of aboriginal Australia, they have a very definite place in the social life of the natives.

The figures collected belong to seven groups, and may be divided into secular and sacred objects, as follows:

Sacred:

Group 1. Major Ancestral Beings.
" 2. Minor Ancestral Beings and Spirits.
" 3. Secular Figures bearing sacred totemic designs.

Secular:

Group 4. Figures based on Macassan burial posts and representations of Macassans; these are known as *'wurɔmu* or "Collection Men" and are associated especially with certain secular camp ceremonies.
" 5. 'Baijini, or figures based on pre-Macassan contact—these are related to the *'wurɔmu* (4).
" 6. 'Ba:du Spirits—being figures of Spirit Men and Women from the Torres Strait Islands.
" 7. 'Wura:tila:gu or Groote Eylandt Woman's Spirit—which has some bearing on woman's life.

A paper on groups 4 and 5 has been prepared for publication, in which eight *'wurɔmu* and five *'Baijini* figures have been briefly described. In this article we discuss Group 1, which contains the most sacred representatives of the Ancestral Beings of this region, and also Group 2, the Minor Ancestral Beings and Spirits, which play a subsidiary part in sacred ritual, mythology and song cycles.

It is not possible, in such a limited space, to describe in detail the ritual associated with each figure, and its complex background: each sacred representation of a

[1] These are kept in the Department of Anthropology, Sydney University, on behalf of the Australian National Research Council, under whose auspices the writers have worked for some years.

4: Berndt & Berndt E-5 (1946-1947) 1948
OI17 Murngin OI17

particular spirit-being has its mythology, ceremonies and elaborate song cycles, some consisting of several hundreds of separate and lengthy songs. This is particularly the case with the concept of the *'Wawəlak* Sisters, which have both sacred and secular songs and ceremonies.[2]

The aborigines of this area belong to what Professor Lloyd Warner has called the "Murngin" culture.[3] They consist of groups of separate clans with a more or less common cultural background[4]: "Murngin" is one name of one of these many clans. They stretch from a point north of Rose River on the south-east of Arnhem Land (opposite Groote Eylandt) north along the coast through Blue Mud and Caledon Bays, Cape Arnhem and Yirrkalla, English Company, Wessell and Elcho Islands, Arnhem Bay, Crocodile Islands (around Milingimbi) to Cape Stewart, but do not penetrate far into the interior. Their dialects vary, but belong to one language group.[5] The clans are divided between the *'jiritja* and *'du:a* patrilineal moieties. A subsection system is being gradually introduced from the south and south-west, but has not yet been fully accepted.

These natives are semi-nomadic and hunt and collect food over wide areas. They rely principally on marine foods, which are plentiful, so that their economy is more or less balanced throughout the whole year.

For many years these coastal aborigines have been in direct and indirect contact with alien groups, particularly with the Malayan and Macassan traders who travelled down to the north coast of Australia from the East Indies in search of trepang (bêche de mer) and other natural products obtained by local aborigines.[6] In the course of years of trading, these visitors had much association with the indigenous inhabitants, and established settlements at desirable sites, particularly on the north-eastern corner of Arnhem Land, where they stayed for several months in each year. After the wet season, in about May or June, they returned in their proas on the south-east winds, sometimes taking aborigines as part of their crew. This contact ended (being prohibited by law) in 1907, but Japanese pearlers continued to visit the shores up to the recent war.

Such intensive contact over a long period made a strong impression on the aborigines; this can be observed to-day in certain elements of the religious life and dogma, in secular ceremonies and songs, in mortuary rites and songs, in mythology

[2] A detailed study of north-eastern Arnhem Land religious beliefs and dogma will be published later.

[3] L. Warner, *A Black Civilization*, 1937.

[4] They may be conveniently termed the 'Wu:lamba Confederacy. *Vide* also T. Webb, "Tribal Organization in Eastern Arnhem Land," *Oceania*, Vol. III, No. 4, p. 410.

[5] *Vide* A. Capell, "Languages of Arnhem Land, North Australia," *Oceania*, Vol. XII, No. 4, and Vol. XIII, No. 1. The collective dialects of this language group can, for convenience, be called *'Mi:wulf 'mata*.

[6] The date of their first contact is a matter of speculation, but is possibly much earlier than has hitherto been stated. A comparatively large collection of pottery shards, recovered from Port Bradshaw, not far distant from Yirrkalla, to be discussed later, may enable an approximate date to be fixed for the establishment of the Macassan settlements, remains of which are still known to the natives.

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OI17 Murngin OI17

and sacred songs, in trade, in fighting, and among material objects. And some alien strain is observable in their physical make-up. In spite of this, however, they retain the fundamental basis of the aboriginal culture.

Since wood-carving of the type to be described here is not normally found in other parts of Australia, it is probable that the design and manufacture were introduced at some early date from Indonesia. Native informants themselves state definitely that these are of indigenous inspiration; and since most of the human figures represented in Groups 1, 2 and 3 are so intimately connected with the mythology and song-life, and since even the most sacred Ancestral Beings are carved and used in ritual, their statement is difficult to refute. On the other hand, figures of Groups 4, 5 and 6 are more or less definitely associated with alien contact, as are their songs and ceremonies. It is therefore a matter of hypothesis whether the figures of sacred intent were sponsored by the Macassan and *'Baijini*-inspired *'wurrmu* and dancing objects.

Their Manufacture.

All carvings, secular or sacred, are made by initiated men, working in a special camp. When the figures are required, at the advent of seasonal ceremonies, a craftsman employs at least two men to cut and trim the required posts. When these have been cut to size, and the bark removed, the artist begins to chip skilfully with a knife or "shovel-nosed" blade,[7] until it takes the shape he requires. He works on this for several days, carving in the details and scraping it smooth with a knife blade, rough stone or piece of shark's skin "sand" paper.[8] It is essential that the body should be smooth, since upon its surface the sacred totemic or clan designs are painted.

This done, he smears the whole figure with red ochre as groundwork for the design, and also to signify ritually that it represents a spirit being in human form. But at this stage, the actual figure has no distinct personality—it is simply a piece of wood shaped like a human being. It is after the painting of the pattern upon its body, face and legs that it becomes imbued with personality, and reaches the status of a sacred being: it is then a symbol of some particular Ancestral Being immortalised in song, mythology and ritual.

The totemic painting is the most important part of its whole manufacture, requiring hours of patient attention, the colours being mixed and ground on stones, and applied with a thin human-hair, bamboo-grass-root or pandanus-cone hair brush. When the figure is ready, it goes to a sacred storehouse to await the ritual showing.

[7] The iron bladed "shovel-nosed" spear is common to this region. Iron was introduced by Indonesian visitors, but never in any great quantity, so that stone axes, adzes and knives were freely used until recent years.

[8] This is mounted on a piece of wood, and used in much the same way as emery paper.

GROUP I

The Sacred Figures and Their Background.

532 616 778 The figures under discussion here belong to both moieties. The *'Wawulak* Sisters[9] are *'du:a*—the more conservative of the two moieties, while *'Laiuljuŋ* and *'Banuiljo* are *'jiriljo*—the moiety that concerns itself to a great extent with introduced beliefs and customs.

776 773 The *'Wawulak* are two "Dreaming"[10] Sisters, associated with the *'djuŋgawu*, *'kunapipi* and *'gu:lmaŋ:k* ceremonies, which are age-grading and seasonal festivals of the *'du:a 'gu:ra* (i.e. "shade" or shelter).[11] Their mythology and their song cycle are preoccupied with after-birth blood, with menstruation, and with giant rock pythons, by one of whom they are swallowed. Although they themselves are looked on as Fertility Mothers,[12] they were originally brought into being by the *'Djaŋgawul*, the most important of all the Ancestral Beings, who were responsible for the peopling of this coast with the predecessors of the present-day aborigines, and for creating all natural resources. The *'Djaŋgawul* Sisters, *'Maralailjo* and *'Pildjiburuŋuiju*, and *'Djaŋgawul* himself, travelled from the mythical land of *Bo'ralku*, bringing with them the sacred *'raŋga* objects used in the sacred rituals, in addition to the ceremonies mentioned above. Unfortunately, although carved figures of the *'Djaŋgawul* are occasionally made, none were used during our period of field work, although all their rituals were observed.

773 Briefly then, the two *'Wawulak* Sisters (one younger than the other) came from *'Mu:rnul* waterhole, in the "Bush" on the mainland below Milingimbi. The elder sister was pregnant, and eventually gave birth to a child; the after-birth blood was still running as she walked along near this place, accompanied by her sister and carrying the baby. They arrived at a deep well, near which they camped.

A large rock python, living in this well, smelt the blood; he came out and sprayed out water like rain. The elder sister told the other to make a bark hut, and by the time this was erected, it was dark. The snake then made vivid flashes of lightning, but the Sisters were unaware that this was his doing. Then the snake came out of the waterhole and on to the bank, and slowly moved towards the sisters. When the women saw him coming, the younger sister got up, and began to dance to keep him away. When she was tired, she called to her sister, who then began to dance in her turn. But as the snake still came on, the elder sister called out, "Come on, sister. It's no good for me—my blood is coming out, and he can smell it and he's coming closer." So the younger sister danced. When she was tired the elder sister

[114] [9] L. Warner (*op. cit.* p. 248 *et seq.*) has given a description of the mythology and ritual of the "Wawilak" Sisters. The version given in this paper differs slightly from this.

[10] Cf. the concept of the "Eternal Dreamtime." Their reality is in the past, but their spirit is eternal.

[178] [11] Each moiety has a sacred shelter during its ceremonies, adjacent to the dancing ground.

[12] The concept of the Fertility Mother is common in Northern Territory of Australia: *vide* R. and C. Berndt, *Sexual Behaviour in Western Arnhem Land*, MS. book for publication.

4: Berndt & Berndt E-5 (1946-1947) 1948
OI17 Murngin OI17

danced again, and the snake came closer. In fear the two sisters retired to their hut, and the monstrous snake coiled around it and put his head through the opening. He sprayed water over them, so that they became slippery and soft for swallowing; then he proceeded to swallow the baby, the mother and finally the younger sister. 773

This is of course only the main theme; the original version and song cycle is very long and detailed, and instead of the blood from after-birth, it is menstruation blood that attracts the snake.

The *'Waawɔlak* myth and sacred songs are known to both men and women, but the ritual and part of the ceremony is for men only, and is held away from the camp.[13] However, certain associated ceremonies (e.g. the *'dʒuŋgɜwɔn*) are performed in the main camp, where conventionalized posts are placed to symbolize the *'Waawɔlak* Sisters, around which women dance. In the north-eastern corner of Arnhem Land, as in other parts along the coast, women are acquainted with much of the sacred life, but may not discuss it. It is said that they originally monopolized all sacred ritual and dogma, and relinquished this right only when their ceremonial objects were stolen by the men. There is also an "outside" or secular song-cycle dealing with the ordinary adventures of these two sisters, which is sung in the camp and to which women dance. 773 533 562

But the carved figures illustrated here are used as *'rayga* objects, in the same way as the sacred *'maraiin* painted and feathered-string-decorated poles of *'Djaŋgɜwɔl*. These are kept in a temporary storehouse out near the dancing ground, and shown to fully initiated men.[14] The original artist who has made the figure enters the hut; outside, the postulants are sitting or standing with faces turned away. The song-man begins to clap his sticks and the others are led up to look upon the sacred object. Finally, when the singing is completed, the designs on the figure are explained and discussed. At times, during the showing of the object, the figure may be held ritually by an actor who writhes on the ground like the python who swallowed the sisters. 796 778 533

What the *'Djaŋgɜwɔl* is to the *'duːa*, *'Laintʃuŋ*[15] is to the *'jiritʃa*: he is the most important of all the *'jiritʃa* Ancestral Beings, and is highly sacred. He came out of the sea, emerging from the waters like a giant stone from the receding tide, at *'Duːwɔn'miliyɯn*, near Blue Mud Bay. His body bore variegated water-marks (*'raːy*) that formed patterns. In the figure illustrated, the totemic designs (belonging to a number of *'jiritʃa* clans) painted on its body are water-mark patterns. 776 616 773 532

Now *'Barɔma*,[16] a *'jiritʃa* man, saw *'Laintʃuŋ* for the first time as he stood on the beach, leaning on a sacred *'rayga* yam stick, and was surprised to observe these watermarks. 773

[13] This with many details is an enactment of the above myth; i.e. in the *'Djaŋgɜwɔn* and *'kunapipi*.

[14] Those who have gone through the *'Djaŋgɜwɔl* rituals.

[15] The name *'Laintʃuŋ* means "white cloud from the sea," signified by the white face in the figure illustrated.

[16] Called also *'Bilmɔlandʒi*, derived from sacred beating sticks (called *'bilma*).

4: Berndt & Berndt E-5 (1946-1947) 1948
OI17 Murngin OI17

773 "I am *'Laintfuŋ*," said the Ancestral Being. "I bring all the *'jiritfa* dreaming and painting: these will belong to you people, no matter what language and what tribe." Then he gave to *'Barɔma* the sacred paintings and the *'raŋga*, so that the totemic designs were distributed among the clans.

The two men then ritually called out (i.e. *'bilkajuːn*), so that all the people could come and learn what had happened. When they had all arrived, sacred dancing took place, paintings were drawn and their meanings were explained. *'Laintfuŋ's* voice went to all the *'jiritfa* clans, and his law became established.

Eventually, he turned himself into a paper-bark tree, and his son *'Banaitfa*[17] took his place. Now *'Banaitfa* was a great religious leader, who was able to elaborate on the ritual and dogma laid down in the beginning by *'Laintfuŋ*, his father. He began to teach men, but his disciples became frightened and talked among themselves. "Is this man really connected with *'Laintfuŋ*, as a son, as he says? What have we got to do?" And they climbed trees with their spears, and waiting for an opportunity speared him so that he died. This was in the *'Buɔraitbi* country at Blue Mud Bay.

But when they had killed him, the murderers realized that *'Banaitfa* was really a great man, and had had a great deal more to tell them; and they were "sorry." So in memory of him they carved his representation, and also made a paper-bark *'banaitfa* pad which is beaten on the ground during sacred rituals; and the sound of this is *'Banaitfa's* voice.[18]

796 The carved figures of both *'Laintfuŋ* and *'Banaitfa* are shown to postulants in
778 the same way as are the *'Wʻanɛɔlak* figures; but this *'jiritfa* ritual is at no time associated with secular ceremonies, or with song-cycles sung in the main camp.

The 'Wʻanɛɔlak Figures.

778 *Plate I, Figure* 1. The younger *'Wʻanɛɔlak* sister, who danced to keep away the large python that eventually swallowed the two sisters and the child.

532 The treatment of this figure's face is peculiar to *'duːa* craftsmen of the old school, and is used only in relation to the *'Wʻanɛɔlak* and *'Dʒaygɛɔl*. The carving of the majority of these sacred figures, both *'duːa* and *'jiritfa* (excluding Figure 6), is distinctive, and differs from the treatment of figures belonging to the other groups. The sacred designs are applied directly to a background of red ochre. The breasts are those of a young girl, while the ridge between them is a cicatrization. Arms are carved solidly to the trunk of the figure, while vulva and buttocks are raised from the background and are not patterned. The whole is painted in red, white, black and yellow. The figure wears around its head a *'bulkɔralku* ornament, and on its body a

[17] I.e. a part of the paper-bark tree; also associated with a giant barramundi fish.

[18] The complete ritual, songs and sacred objects associated with *'Laintfuŋ* and *'Banaitfa* will be discussed at a later date. Representations of *'Laintfuŋ-'Banaitfa* objects and paper-bark beaters are held at the Department of Anthropology, Sydney University, for the Australian National Research Council.

The figure wears around its head a "bulkowalku ornament, and on its body a 'maitga, the red-ochred jungle-string girdle which young girls often wear for decoration and for "strengthening" the breasts. A string pubic apron ('mudpu) is also worn, but more for decoration than for actual covering.

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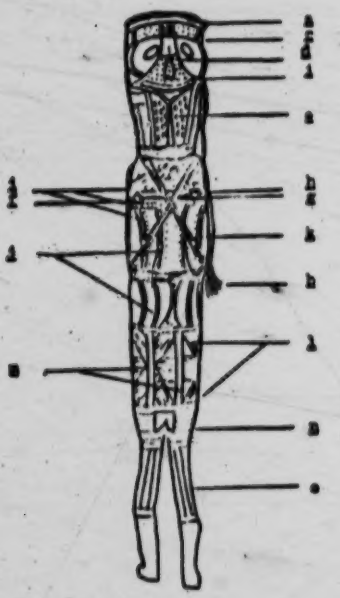

Text-figure A.

The text-figure A, which is a rough sketch of the *'Wanwolak* figure in Plate I, figure 1, is a guide to the meaning of the pattern.

- *a* *'bulkowalku* head ornament, made of jungle-string fibre into which have been woven seagull down and parakeet feathers; the terminating pendant (*b*) is of wild-honey wax and seagull feathers.
- *c* the head-band, called *'marapipi*, *'kalamba*, or *'warambala*.
- *d* *'gu:lgul*, outline of cheek or groove between nose and eye.
- *e* the *'dayara* flower of the *'du:rilji* gum tree, associated with the *'Wanwolak* in the song cycles.
- *f* small swelling breasts, *'diligin'wirlkul*.
- *g* breast or chest ridge, *'gumul* or *'kulmalki*.
- *h* cicatrization.
- *i* small scars called *'kupu:wa:pu*, or "water painting," from the rain made by the python (see myth).

4: Berndt & Berndt E-5 (1946-1947) 1948
O117 Murngin O117

532 778

j *'kunja:lili* boomerang, which is not used but is simply a pattern; this is the small one associated with the whale.

k the *'maiga* girdle.

l menstruation blood flowing inside the young sister's body; it flows around her navel from the breasts and enters her uterus (*m*), where it is stored, and finally escapes at the menstrual period.

n cuts on the upper thighs or buttocks, signifying the circumcision of her husband.

o menstruation blood running down her legs.

The designs on the back of the figure are similar to those on the front; on the arms are other marks, signifying cuts for her brother's circumcision, and dots which are *'du:rilji* flowers.

773 An addition to the abovementioned myth tells how the younger sister danced forward to meet her older sister after the birth of her child. As soon as the younger entered the hut (branch shelter) in which the mother and child were living, she felt her menstrual pains; the blood was flowing from breasts to navel and thence to her uterus, and then began to flow in the normal way as she sat down. In this case, it is said, the menstrual blood was brought to flow sooner than she had expected, because of the girl's energetic dancing and the movement of her hips and buttocks.

532 778 Artist: *'Maureu:lau*, headman of the *'Ri:rədzigu 'mata, 'du:a.*

Full length, 32 inches; length from top of head to shoulders, 8 inches; width of shoulders, 4·5 inches; diameter of head, 4 inches.

Plate 1, Figure 2. The *'Wamələk* Sister. This well-made figure is similar in design to the younger sister (as above, figure 1), but the pattern is first incised on a red-ochred background and finally painted in black, yellow and white. Arms are standing out from the trunk of the body, and the breasts are elongated to signify "fallen milks," by which term they are known, i.e. full and pendulous breasts.

There is a little variation in the meaning of the designs. Horizontal lines between and above the breasts are cicatrizations, while the cut immediately beneath is said to keep the breasts from falling too far, and to stop the milk in them from flowing back towards the navel and into the uterus and out through the vagina with the after-birth blood. Marks on the shoulders are *'galmakit*, for a brother's circumcision; while dots on the chest are *'kapu:ŋa:pa* or scars, signifying the rain sent by the python.

The design on the back of the figure, similar to that on the front, represents blood flowing from about the vertebræ above the buttocks to the lower ribs and thence to the navel (surrounding marks signifying flowing blood are *'nimpu*) and to the uterus, and out through the vagina. The latter is painted red, like the blood. This is the blood from after-birth. The belief that the blood flows from the back, is said to have its foundation in menstrual pains in that region, and pains in the same place when giving birth to a child; e.g. the midwife presses and massages the back of a woman at an impending birth, and as the child is born.

4: Berndt & Berndt E-5 (1946-1947) 1948
O117 Murngin O117

Blood is taken from the vagina and smeared on the *'Wawulak's* head-band; this is represented on the back of the head, and by the dots on the forehead. It should also be smeared on the feathered head ornament (as in figure 1), which is missing from this figure. 532 778

Artist: *'Mawulan*, as above.

Full length, 36 inches; length from top of head to shoulders, 8 inches; width of shoulders, 5 inches; diameter of head, 4·5 inches.

The 'Laintfuy-'Banaitfa Figures.

Plate 1, Figure 3. This remarkably fine and unusual figure of the Ancestral Being, *'Laintfuy*, is unique in its treatment, remarkably well executed, and of high aesthetic value. Along with the *'Wawulak* sisters and the *'Banaitfa* (i.e. Figure 4), it is one of the most important carvings, and is a definite revelation of the heights to which aboriginal sacred art can obtain.

Like all these carvings, it loses something in its photographic representation; the natural colours of red, black, white and yellow give to the originals a "life" and movement that is difficult and almost impossible to translate in words or line-drawing. To see these figures in their own environment, invested with their sacred value, surrounded by postulants, amid the chanting of songs, is an experience which is outstanding and important in the life of the observer.

The *'Laintfuy* figure has arms carved out from the main trunk of its body, and shows the usual fundamental colours of white, black, red and yellow. The front of the head to the chin is painted white, while the back is left red-ochred. The top of the head is flat and has human hair, fastened on with blood. At each corner of the mouth are parakeet[19] feathers, bunched together with "sugar-bag" (wild honey) wax and stuck into the wood; this suggests a moustache – the upper lip being bare of hair, with long tufts left at each side between the lips and cheeks.[20] A feathered ornament extending from the chin, and jutting outwards to a point below the shoulders, represents a beard. The first bunch of feathers is from the parakeet, and the second seagull feathers; each is held together by a base of "sugar-bag" wax, while the latter is painted white. Feathers are tied to the end of its beard in ritual, and are called *'rayga:r* (not *'rayga*). The figure wears the red-ochred head band with white ochre and vertical lines, called *'kalamba*, that is used only for dancing. A red-ochred band extends from ear to ear, across the nose; this is the usual facia decoration, called *'ɹnɔbi*, used when dancing in sacred ceremonies. On its left arm the figure wears a parakeet-feathered armband, called *'ju:ɔ*. This figure should also have a *'mindyalpi* dancing dilly bag strung around its neck; but the original is missing. [302]

[19] From the sacred *'lindɹiʌf* bird, whose feathers are in great demand, used for making feathered string objects and in adorning *'rayga*. [237]

[20] Feathers are tied to the tips of a moustache, as a beard, in ceremony.

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OI17 Murngin OI17

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778 The body of this figure, both front and back, is painted with the sacred totemic patterns (originally from watermarks) that *'Laintfuŋ* distributed to the various *'jiritfa* clans. In order to differentiate between these designs, the accompanying rough sketch is provided (text-figure B).

Front of Figure.

a *'Dalwɔŋu*, being a freshwater weed design: diamond design red-ochred, edged with white and yellow, the rest white. *'Laintfuŋ* sent this design to *'Gruwutfu:lilji* at the top of Blue Mud Bay, where it was taken by the *'Dalwɔŋu*-speaking group.

b *'Dalwɔŋu-'Madarlpa* (joined): black irregular bands, rest yellow and white.

c *'Madarlpa* (as apart from *'Dalwɔŋu*): *'Laintfuŋ* sent this to the *'Madarlpa* people at *Bɔ'raldja*, near Blue Mud Bay; the design is fire or ashes inside seaweed and mud: black irregular bands, the rest white and yellow.

d *'Ri:taryu-'Wɔnguri-'Mayga:lilji* (joined). This design came to *'Druru:lapa* near Blue Mud Bay, and symbolized a hollow log under the water. (Same colouring as above.)

e *'Gumaitf:* at same locality near Blue Mud Bay. Red-ochre, and cliff design. (Same colouring as above.)

f *'Gumaitf:* design is bark ready to be stripped, and looking down between the cleavage of the bark from the trunk of the tree. (Same colouring as above.)

g *'Wɔnguri:* *'milka*, mangrove worm, coloured white. This is associated with the log design of *d*, which is rotten, being riddled with this worm (*g*).

h *'Ri:taryu-'Wɔnguri* (joined): spring-water running at *'Wu:ru:lmal* (yellow, red and white).

i Continuation of *'Mayga:lilji* design (*d*). (Colouring as *h*.)

j *'Munaitfa:* white dots are honey-bees, and the diamond-shaped designs are the honeycomb (white, edged with yellow).

k *'Gumaitf-'Ri:taryu* at *'Bilmalandji*; white dots are honey bees, and black dots symbolize fire (ashes); the diamond-shaped designs are honeycomb (white, edged with yellow).

l *'Gumaitf-'Ri:taryu* at *'Deiwɔru:* meaning of design similar to *k* (same colouring as above).

m white, as is the whole face.

n head band; red-ochre, with white vertical stripes.

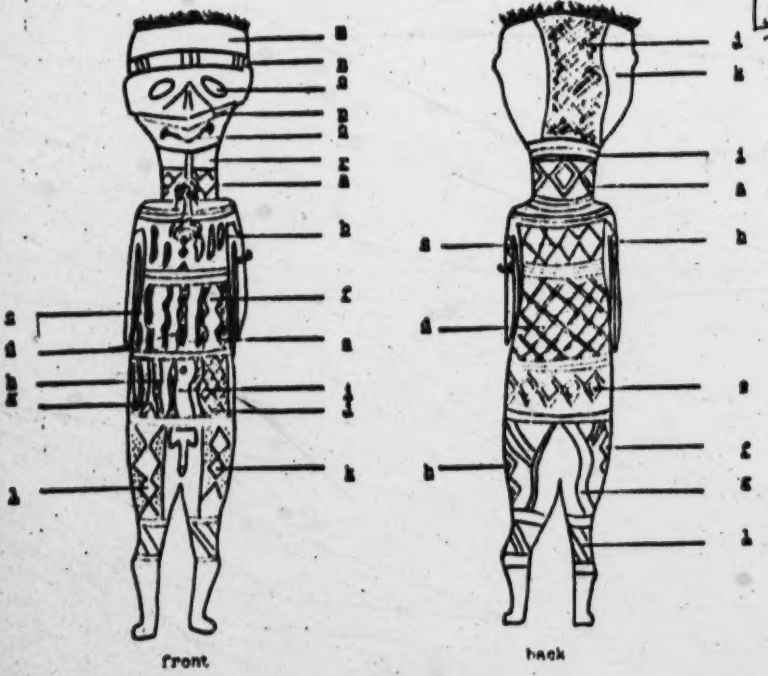
o red-ochred eyes, black pupil.

p red-ochred facial mark.

q inside of mouth, red-ochred.

r red, yellow, white bands.

It should be mentioned that originally the *'milka* (*g*) belonged to the *'Mayga:lilji* speaking group; but this big log, *'kadauwalk* (see *d*) "said he was in the wrong place: he had become rotten from lying in fresh water." He (i.e. the log) left that place and, travelling under the ground, came out at *'Druru:laps* at Arnhem Bay (named after *'Druru:laps* at Blue Mud Bay) with the *'milka* inside; the latter was alive because it came out in salt water. The log (which is used as a sacred object) went



Text-figure B.

on, coming out from the ground at *'Danayalpi* (below *'Druru:laps*); later it went on to *'Kanbaldzi* (on the mainland opposite Elcho Island), and then on to *'Mi:luwo* (near Milingimbi), so that now all these places from Blue Mud Bay to Milingimbi are ritually connected through the *'jiritfa* clans.

On the other hand, the *'Madarlpa*-speaking people have fire-dreaming; this fire came from burning stringy-bark, which extended through the *'Manaitfa* territory where the honey and bees were (*f*), and on to the *'Gumaitf*; from there to the *'Ri:taryn*, *'Bilkilji*, *'Ku:popiyu* and *'Waromori*. It was from there that a small bird took a

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O117 Murngin O117

113 burning twig and flew with it to the salt water. In reference to designs *h* and *l*, it is said that the honey bee made fire in every direction—so that the bee and honey design joins with the fire.[91]

532 718 *Back of Figure.*

- *a* *'Dalwɔŋu* design; see above: diamond-shaped design red-ochred, edged with white and yellow.
- *b* *'Dalwɔŋu* design on arms.
- *c* " bottom *'Dalwɔŋu* " design: diamond design edged with yellow, filled in with white stripes.
- *d* *'Ǫelkala:* ordinary honey design; no fire or honey bee: black, yellow, red and white colouring.
- *e* *'Bilkilji:* freshwater long-necked turtle design, which has water-weed under its shell: it is for this reason that it is associated with the *'Dalwɔŋu* (see front of figure design, *a*): diamond designs filled in with red-ochre, edged with yellow and white; rest white.
- *f* on side of thighs: *'Bilkilji-'Ku:pɔpiŋu* (joined), as *c*.
- *g* water-marks on body, yellow and white.
- *h* on left side of thigh: *'Deiwɔru-'Bilkilji* (joined), as *c*.
- *i* yellow band edged with white.
- *j* red-ochred.
- *k* white, continuation from front of figure.
- *l* white strokes.

In the painting of this figure the totemic designs of the *'Lamɔmɔri*, actual *'Warɔmɔri*, and *'Makalranalmɔri* were omitted, because the headmen of these groups were absent.

Artists: *'Li:gə'ray*, *'Dalwɔŋu*; and *'Muŋgɔrau*, *'Gumaitf*: *'jiritfa 'mala*.

Full length, 36·5 inches; length from top of head to shoulders, 10 inches; length of beard, 6 inches; diameter of head, 5·25 inches; width across shoulders, 5·5 inches.

Plate I, Figure 4. *'Banaitfa*, the son of *'Laintfuŋ*. This is also a remarkable piece of carving, unlike any of the other figures. A massive neck supports a comparatively small head with a contemplative expression, whereas that of the *'Laintfuŋ* is almost enigmatic. Except for the chest design, the figure is completely red-ochred—which makes it more difficult to photograph. Particularly noticeable is the carving of the protruding buttocks and the delicately shaped legs. Arms are well set from the main trunk of the body; elbows, but not hands, are shown.

[91] Long and elaborate myths and songs describe and explain these totemic clan designs that *'Laintfuŋ* distributed. These will be discussed later. Large collections of bark drawings also present and describe the sacred designs, as does a large collection of brown paper drawings, all in the possession of the Department of Anthropology, Sydney University, and of the writers.

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OI17 Murngin OI17

The design on the body and at the back, in yellow, red, white and black, symbolizes stringy-bark, and is associated with the *'Manaitfu* and the *'Dalwɔŋu* speaking people at Blue Mud Bay.

Artists: *'Li:gɔ'ray, 'Dalwɔŋu; 'Muŋgɔrau, 'Gumaitf,* and *'Dʒimba:jun, 'Makalraŋalmɔri; 'jiritfa'mata.*

Full length, 42·5 inches; length from top of head to shoulders, 12 inches; length of neck, 6·5 inches; diameter of head, 5·5 inches; width across shoulders, 6·5 inches.

Plate I, Figure 5. *'Banaitfu.* This is a well carved figure, but not with the details shown in Figures 3 and 4. Head, neck and shoulders are painted black; the face itself is white to the upper lip; this symbolizes the *'bulumbu:l* or white foam watermark, and the black colouring represents the dark skin colouring of a native, termed *'mɔ:l.* A yellow band attached at each end to thin white bands is the *'kalamba* head-band. Eyes are fringed with yellow, with a pupil of white. A facial band, drawn on the skin, is represented by white bands around the chin and extending along the jaw around the back of the head. Arms are carved solidly on to the trunk of the figure, and fingers are outlined; the penis is painted yellow, and its apex white, the testes also are white. Legs are red-ochred to the knees, and the rest left plain.

The sketch (text-figure C) describes the designs.

Front of Figure.

- *a* yellow band.
- *b* black.
- *c* white water-mark.
- *d* white facial bands.
- *e* black neck.
- *f* yellow, red and white bands.
- *g* *'Dalwɔŋu* pattern; this design is copied from the place where *'Laiutfuŋ* emerged; it symbolizes spring water on the beach: first row of diamond designs is black, the second red, third black, fourth red, other colouring white and yellow.
- *h* *'Dalwɔŋu* design: salt water mixing with the fresh water (called "taste together"), i.e. top row of diamond designs is fresh water, the bottom row salt water.
- *i* salt water, divided from fresh spring water (*g*) by *h*. *'Dalwɔŋu.*
- *j* as *h*, water running across.

Back of Figure.

- *a* black.
- *b* white band continued from front of face.
- *c* as *g* in front of figure: band of black, red diamond design; black, red, white criss-cross, and black band—the rest white, red and yellow.

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OI17 Murngin OI17

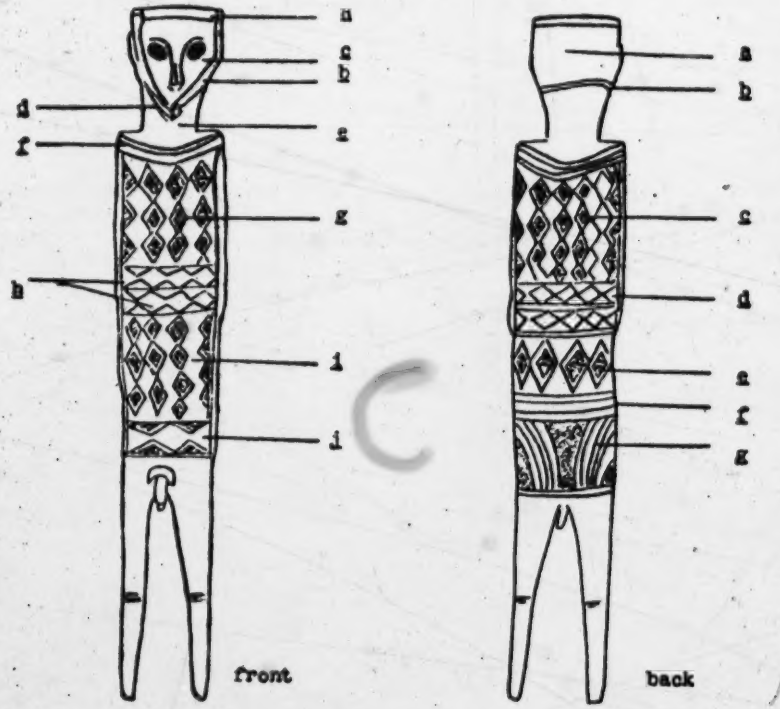
532 778

d water flowing across: first row of diamond designs, filled in with red and white, second row filled in with white.

e salt water: diamond design filled in with red.

f white, red and yellow bands.

g sea-weed in red, yellow and white on a background of black.



Text-figure C.

[173] *'Banaitja* was apparently first in the *'Dalwɔŋu*[22] territory, and gave to people of this language group three lots of special totemic paintings, and not just one, as in the case of the other groups. Hence the *'Dalwɔŋu* have a prior right over *'Banaitja* rituals.

Artist: *'Li:gə'ray*, as above.

[22] Seaside "bottom" *'Dalwɔŋu*.

Full length, 33·5 inches; length from top of head to shoulders, 6·25 inches; diameter of head, 5·25 inches; width at shoulders, 4·5 inches.

Plate I, Figure 6. The final figure of this group is a representation of a *'Banaitʃa* female. Very little of these women is mentioned in the sacred mythology, but songs do refer to sisters of *'Banaitʃa*. This figure is in the likeness of *'Laintʃuŋ*'s daughter at a place called *'Gu:lɔldʒi* in the *'Dalwɔŋu* country. Her special name is *'Barama*, while her sacred name is *'Bilwana*. She is also called *'Mundamunda*, from her body markings, representing bubbles rising to the surface of fresh water, and *'Mundalwaltun*, which refers to barramundi scales arising from the water.[23] This woman, unlike her father *'Laintʃuŋ*, always hides in the water and never emerges.

The figure is rather carelessly carved, and the designs are coloured yellow and white on a red-ochred background, in the conventional manner. Both back and front of this figure are patterned in the sacred *'Dalwɔŋu* clan design, representing bubbles arising from the water, and water-weed spreading across the surface of the water. The pupils of the eyes are painted black; while a yellow band across the forehead, with vertical white and red lines, is a headband, and other lines represent facial markings in yellow and white.

Artist: *'Li:ŋgɔ'raŋ*, as above.

Full length, 29·5 inches; length from top of head to shoulders, 7·25 inches; diameter of head, 5 inches; width across shoulders, 5·5 inches.

Group 2

The Figures and Their Background.

Male and female *'Kultana*, each known by a variety of names,[24] are associated with the *'jiritʃa* conception of the Land of Spirits, to which human beings of this moiety must go after death. The spirits of deceased *'du:a* moiety men and women, irrespective of clan, travel to the fabulous country of *Bɔ'ralku*, the original home of the Great Ancestral Beings, known as the *'Dʒaŋgɔ:l*, who themselves brought into being the predecessors of the present aborigines.[25] Consistent with their less conservative ideas, the *'jiritʃa* home of the dead is located at *'Ba:du* (or Badu; i.e. Badu Island in the Torres Strait Islands group). It is there, in a land of running spring water, coconut palms, bread fruit, rice and light-skinned people who cut timber and live in stilted houses, that the spirit is said to find eventual repose.

[23] For *'Banaitʃa* is associated with the barramundi fish.

[24] The man is called also *'Ranjiranji*, *'Ŋɔ:wunba*, *'Ma:ldʒidʒi*, *'Wu:rimila*, *'Li:abalguk*, *'Gɔ:ŋɔraldʒuŋ*, *'Dʒu:pinga:ma*, *'Kauwu:ŋɔ*, *'Dʒalba:ru*, *'Kundʒɔ'rɔl*, etc., as well as a number of subsidiary names referring to particular incidents in his existence, e.g. *'Da:ga:dʒi:njalwu:l* (looking around for stingray in the mangroves), *'jiribuma* (scratching himself after being bitten by mosquitoes), *'Dʒi:wɔ:luŋɔ:rɔrɔ* (coming out into the shallow water of a mangrove swamp, looking for stingray), etc., etc. His wife is also known as *'Wuleiwuli*, *'Danbɔramɔ*, *'Munandilya*, *'Kɔ:ŋwɔ:raiŋun*, *'Laudrilaudri*, *'Mu:rhandʒa*, *'Kɔ:ŋlilji'naŋɔ*, *'Kuruŋgur*, *'Malwaŋgitʃ*, *'Meiwada*, *'Dihmi:a*, *'Mara:waldʒiŋani* and *'Murandilŋɔ*, etc.

[25] *'Dʒaŋgɔ:wɔl* is associated with the concept of the Fertility Mother, which will be discussed in detail later.

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'*Kultana* belongs to the '*Gumaitʃ'mata* (language) group near Port Bradshaw, but this spirit and his wife seem to have other spheres of influence outside their home territory. For example, '*Kultana* also lives on an island called '*Mɔ:dilya*, north of the Wessells, and lights large fires of grass and " rubbish " to attract spirits of the dead on their way to '*Ba:du*. The male '*Kultana*, when he is not supervising the journeying spirits, hunts for stingray in the shallow waters of the mangrove swamps, and scratches his mosquito bites; while his wife gathers wood, collects jungle-fowl eggs, and generally spends her time in the jungles fringing the beach. There are no actual ceremonies associated with these '*Kultana*, although there is some secular mortuary dancing; but there are both sacred and camp songs related to their adventures and general behaviour.

'*Murɔru:ma* is the " Turtle " Man from Bremer Island (at one time called Melville Island), and is associated with '*du:a* '*Ri:rədʒiyu* '*mata* secular and sacred life; he, his wives and his sons, '*Dayədʒi:ɔna* and '*Wuralwural*, are immortalized particularly in an elaborate song cycle sung in the camp, while '*Murɔru:ma* himself plays only a subsidiary part in the sacred songs. However, to the '*Ri:rədʒiyu* speaking group he is an important being, connected with the principal physical features of their country, which is localized around Yirrkalla. The myth itself deals with his turtle hunting, the murder of his '*jiritʃa* '*Wɔnguri* wife (he had other wives, belonging to the '*Lamɔmɔri*, '*Warɔmɔri* and '*Gumaitʃ* speaking clans), and consequent feuds arising from this killing. His wife was killed because she wished to have nothing to do with her husband, refused his sexual attentions, and wanted to return to her own country. He killed her by inserting his knife in her vagina, and slitting her upwards to the throat. A revenge expedition on the part of the dead wife's family succeeded in killing '*Murɔru:ma* at Melville Bay, on the mainland.

'*Murɔru:ma's* two sons, who were living at Bremer Island, came with their friends to the point of land opposite Bremer, near Yirrkalla; there they saw the spirit of '*Murɔru:ma*, but believing him to be a human being they were glad, as they had not heard of his death. Coming close to him, they saw him disappear; and looking out to sea they saw a big rock which they knew must be his spirit. They spoke among themselves, saying that they would avenge his death. The rest of the myth concerns several killings and other details too numerous to present here.

These carved figures, whether they be the realistic or conventionalized (i.e. as the " post " figure, Plate I, Figure 4) representations, are used as '*rayga* objects, in much the same way as are the sacred ('*maraiin*) painted and feathered-string-decorated poles of '*Dʒaygɔwɔl*, '*Laintfuy*, '*Banaitfa*, '*Wauwɔlak* etc. They are kept in a store-house near the ritual dancing ground and shown to initiated men.[24] The original artist who has made the figure enters the hut; outside, the postulants sit or stand with averted heads. The song man begins to beat his sticks, and the others are led up to look upon the sacred object. Finally, when the singing is completed, the

[24] Those who have gone through a series of '*maraiin* ceremonies, but may not yet have been admitted to the viewing of certain sacred '*rayga*.

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778
796

designs on the figure are explained and discussed. There is no dancing with these, as there is with the figures of the *'Wauwolak-'Laintfuŋ-'Banaitfa* group.

The Figures.

Plate II, Figure 1. Female *'Kultana*. The body, face and part of the legs are painted in vertical bands of red, black, yellow and white, which represent the rain streaming down her body. She is sitting at *'Dʒu:ltunma:dʒi*, in the bush above Port Bradshaw in *'Gumaitf* country, engaged in sending the cold *'jiritfa* winds. A fringe of "wild coffee" tree bark, stripped and made into fibre, is tied around her head, representing hair. There are no arms to the figure, while breasts and pubes are raised.

532
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Artist: *'Muŋgɔraui, 'Gumaitf 'mata, 'jiritfa.*

Full length, 36·5 inches; length from top of head to shoulders, 9·5 inches; diameter of head, 7·75 inches; width across shoulders, 6 inches.

Plate II, Figure 2. A male *'Kultana*. The decoration on the body and part of the legs is similar to that in Figure 1, but the face is painted with a head-band in black, white and yellow, and certain facial markings usually worn by this spirit. The vertical bands on his body also represent rain streaming down his body, as he walks through the shallow water spearing stingray. This is the best time to catch these fish, which come into the shallows along the coast when they hear the rain falling on the surface of the water. This *'Kultana* is at *'Jalkjalkdun* on the beach near Port Bradshaw in *'Gumaitf* country.

Artist: *'Muŋgɔraui* (as above).

Full length, 33·5 inches; length from top of head to shoulders, 10·25 inches; diameter of head, 4 inches; width across shoulders, 5 inches.

Plate II, Figure 3. *'Murɔru:ma*, the Bremer Island "Turtle" Man.—The predominant colouring of the face is white and red, while the front of the body design is incised and painted in black, yellow, white and red: head-band and facial markings are drawn on the figure.

On the left-hand section of the design is *'Murɔru:ma's* canoe (yellow, white and black), between black and yellow bands representing reefs. On the top right-hand side are rocks, near the mainland point opposite Bremer Island, while below are two "Moon" fish (*'manala*), one with yellow and white stripes and the other with black and white stripes; the black band on the side is another reef.

Below this design is a male green-backed turtle (white, red and black), with waves at each side (white, black and red bands). The top of the head is painted white to represent seagull excreta.

On the back of the figure's head are clouds (horizontal lines in yellow, red, black and white), while in the middle of two rows of vertically placed horizontal bars is a sacred "dilly-bag," called *'waraitfwaraitf*. On the back, the middle section is incised and painted with two green-backed turtles—the top one a male, facing a female (both in yellow, black and white), and dragging seaweed (radiating horizontal

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OI17 Murngin OI17

bands, in red, white, black and yellow). Vertical bands across the shoulders are waves; at one side of the turtles is a row of *'nunda:ka* limpet shells, and on the opposite side a row of *'girəwitʃi*, common beach shells (cockles), in yellow, white, black and red.

Artist: *'Mauwu:lan*, *'Ri:rədʒiŋu 'mata*, *'du:a*, helped by *'Bununŋu*, *'Gumaitʃ mata*, *'jiritʃa*.

Full length, 27 inches; length from top of head to shoulders, 8 inches; diameter of head, 5 inches; width across shoulders, 5 inches.

Plate II, Figure 4. *'Murərru:ma*, as a post, without realistically carved legs. The whole figure is incised and brilliantly painted in red, yellow, black and white. He wears a head-band representing clouds, and also has facial markings. Around his neck he wears his sacred *'waraitʃ-waraitʃ*, "dilly bag," while the main design on the body represents clouds and rain. At the back of the head, clouds and rain are again drawn, while white clouds are on the shoulders and below (this is an intricately worked pattern in red, white, yellow and black); long vertical bands, plainly painted in red and yellow, are two spears associated with the Thunder Man (*'Bɔ:tyu*), who is connected with the Bremer Island song cycle and mythology.

Artists: *'Mauwu:lan* and *'Bununŋu* (as above).

Full length, 31 inches; length from top of head to shoulders, 7·25 inches; diameter of head, 3·5 inches; width across shoulders, 3·5 inches.

This paper records only certain sacred figures of major and minor ancestral beings, and makes available, as soon as possible after their discovery, some information on these north-eastern Arnhem Land human figures. No attempt is made to treat in detail their religious or secular significance, their abundant mythology and varied song cycles, or their importance to the individuals themselves. A full and comprehensive account of their significance requires a major work.

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532
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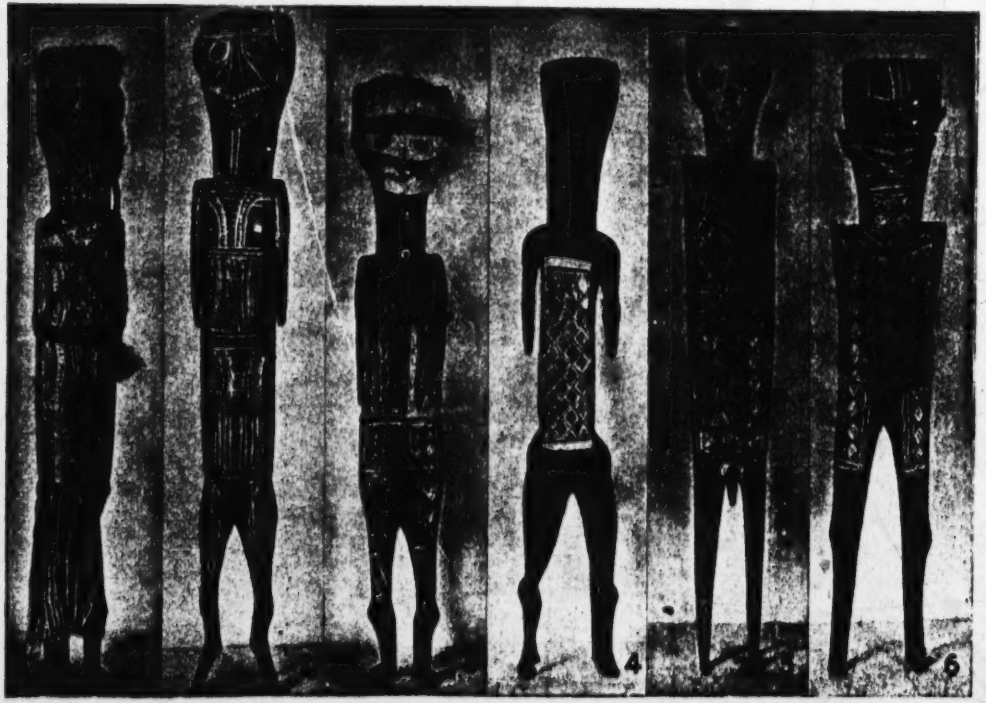
SACRED FIGURES OF ANCESTRAL BEINGS OF ARNHEM LAND. PLATE 1



1. *The younger 'Wauwelak sister.* 2. *The elder 'Wauwelak sister.* 3. *'Laintfuy.* 4. *'Banaitfa, of the massive neck.* 5. *'Banaitfa, with the white foam water-marked face.* 6. *Sister of 'Banaitfa.*

Cp. 326 A)

532
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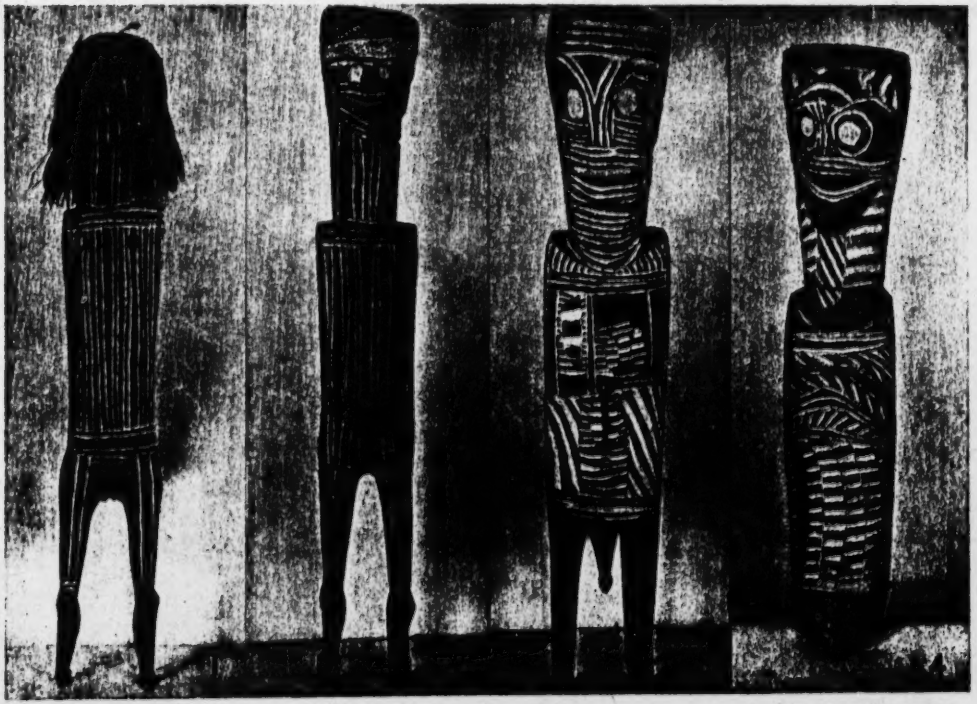
SACRED FIGURES OF ANCESTRAL BEINGS OF ARNHEM LAND. PLATE II



1. *Female 'Kultana, with fibre hair.* 2. *Male 'Kultana.* 3. *'Murorru:ma, the Bremer Island "Turtle" Man.* 4. *'Murorru:ma post figure.*

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OII7 Murngin OII7